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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

THE VICE OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

IT seems fair to say that in the present age the interest in philosophical problems is more widespread and more intense than for a long time past. Even in the palmiest days of the Grecian culture, or of idealism in the German universities, the numbers engaged—whether of individuals or schools—were presumably not so great as now, nor was the mutual clearing-up of ideas which discussion affords so eagerly sought. And certainly never was controversy so keen. We have to-day at least four clear-cut reforms—pragmatism, intuitionism, radical empiricism, and new realism,—besides the older systems of absolutism, and idealism, voluntaristic or rationalistic. Contemporaneous with these lives on the hoary figure of Thomism, the most massive and enduring system known to history; and it displays a by no means diminished vitality. Was ever a time blessed (or cursed) with so many currents and counter-currents? For all these refute one another's main theses, agreeing perhaps only in the one point that they seek knowledge. Philosophy to-day has the appearance of a rising tide, with its eddies, rapids, backwaters; and one who rides upon the stream can not easily find the direction in which he should steer his bark. Each current seizes it in turn, impelling it in a different direction; the waters are a true maelstrom from which no issue readily greets the eye.

In view of such a situation it seems advisable to draw back from the clash of systems, and to recall a few truisms in regard to the nature of philosophy's problem. For it may be that (to vary the metaphor) the dust of combat has somewhat obscured that problem's proper sense. All unnoticed, perhaps the battleground has gradually shifted from the fertile country where conquest is profitable to the desert where the victor can claim no spoils. Such is the besetting danger of controversy. And there seems to be reason for suspecting that recent philosophy has to a large extent succumbed to the peril. Indeed, we believe that the principal systems which are to-day offered to the seeker after knowledge are not, on the whole, fertile of results

which satisfy the native philosophic instinct. The victory of any of them would be more or less barren. Is so grave an indictment too extreme to deserve a hearing? At any rate, it is only a shade worse than the customary practise of disproving all the systems but one. And of course we do not mean that no system provides *any* true satisfaction to the inquiring mind. Many undoubtedly do; perhaps all. Speaking generally, however, the cardinal doctrines which the opponents love to refute are matters whose decision, no matter who had the right of it, would not quench, nor suggest a means of quenching, the philosophic thirst.

What then is the true problem, and in what way do the present systems lose sight of it? Obviously, the first question must be answered before we can intelligently attack the second. Now we conceive that the right way to ascertain what is the true problem of philosophy is to ask, what do men want, that they philosophize? What need does philosophy attempt to meet? To learn this, it seems best to begin with some fundamental, if trite, statements concerning human needs in general. For if philosophy—like every other human activity—arises in response to a specific need, its significance can not be properly estimated until the place of that need with respect to the rest is known.

What, then, are the needs of men? Certainly their number is enormous. We might perhaps summarize them: health, moderate wealth, peace, social organization, knowledge, beauty. Yet such a list would not, even if the details were filled in, be adequate to the situation. There is another need also, which we proceed to specify. Some men do not need the above goods very much; for they have them. Many do, however; and in some cases desperately. And while this is so, no man of intelligence and sympathy, however fortunate himself, can be quite contented or idle. There presses upon him a problem; the great problem of satisfying, or helping to satisfy, the above needs for humanity in general. In addition, then, to the particular wants which each man feels on his own account, there is one great need which may be called the general human problem. It is thrust upon every man alike, and is, for human beings, the absolute problem; for it includes in itself every particular need of everyone. However vague and general it is, it is commanding; indeed, in imperiousness it has no equal. It is the initial, all-embracing task, in respect to which all other tasks must be rated. How may any man cope with this task? Were it no more than such a conglomerate as has been described, the attempt would be hopeless. But a little scrutiny will show that it is capable of articulation, developing into an orderly precession of problems which embody the fundamental

human needs; and among these, at the proper juncture, will appear philosophy.

All the particular needs comprised in the general problem may be grouped under two heads, or classes of good, viz., knowledge and practical well-being; giving us the joys of contemplation and those of action or passion. Though both sorts of good may reside in one and the same object, or one kind may be the means to the other, they are distinct ends, and often are pursued in comparative independence of each other. The physicist does not usually seek to be a social reformer, nor the merchant prince a biologist. Yet, however different they are, the value of each end would be enriched by addition of the other. It is to the scientist good in itself to know the properties of electricity; but the utility of the knowledge in no way detracts from, but rather enhances, the measure of its worth. The organization of a democratic commonwealth is a vast practical achievement; but it loses nothing of excellence if it is found to be a structure of great artistic merit. No intolerance is demanded by the pursuit of either sort of good. However much of exclusive concentration each may for a time demand of the pursuer, their duality is not in the end a hostility. Each demands supplementation, so far as possible, by the other. The initial need, in dividing, remains integral; in fact, we shall soon see that division is the very means of retaining its integrity through the transformation it must undergo.

For this division of the problem is no bare formality; it has important consequences. Knowledge and practical welfare, supplementary though they are, are not quite on the same level. They are not coordinate; in the technical language of logic, their relation is an asymmetrical one. In the order of time, practise comes first; and this is true both of the race and of the individual. The new-born human beings acts instinctively, thinking and planning but little or not at all. And in history thought did not appear, as a noticeable or predominant aim for its own sake, until after a period of successful struggle for material goods. To be sure, there was always with the adult—perhaps even with the new-born—some thought, some trace of a contemplative attitude, and with every thought there is, if you will, some action; but the difference of emphasis in the different periods is too marked to be neglected. Whenever, indeed, we shall speak of knowledge or of practise, we must be understood to mean not either utterly without the other, but a condition of life in which one or the other largely predominates. Now as, in time, practise in the main precedes contemplation, so in order of value the latter must be assigned the priority. Does this statement provoke a denial, on the ground that two so disparate values can not well be compared? Or again, because both being necessary to life, neither is more valu-

able than the other? Let us then remember that when a man chooses one out of several callings, he compares, and compares intelligently, the most dissimilar values. Perhaps there are no two ideals, of however divergent character, that have not been at some time and by some one, intelligently compared. Nor do we customarily refuse to consider two equally necessary functions as of unequal value. The brain is generally regarded as having more value than the liver, though both are necessary to life. But even if such comparisons were not permissible, we do, nevertheless, find, in the case of knowledge and practical well-being, a rational manner of adjudging their claims, in the fact that we can compare the results to which they lead. The great apparent progress that man has made, has been accomplished largely by the application of science; and the theoretical side here came first. When it is a question of progress, a high degree of satisfaction of the needs of thought is prerequisite; practical comfort, beyond a certain elementary amount, is no *conditio sine qua non*. The gratification of intellectual wants does not suffice of itself to ameliorate the lot of man, beyond a certain degree; but it achieves something toward that end, and it makes possible a practical application which is its fitting crown. On the other hand, practical well-being by itself degenerates into animal content or stupidity. It is not that its measure of satisfaction is less than that which comes from pure intellectual cultivation. Many would say so, but we need not insist upon the point. It is rather that it contains in itself no stimulus to advance. To know is to see the desirability of practise as well as theory; to be well-off is not necessarily to see any thing beyond the immediate satisfactions. Knowledge thus has a twofold value as against practise's onefold. It provides for, and urges to, if it does not ensure, another value besides its own. We should then conclude that if we are forced to choose between a life devoted to knowledge and one devoted to more directly practical pursuits, the former is, other things being equal, the better choice. However incomplete in view of the whole human problem it may be, it gives a greater prospect for the future. It comes nearer to being that best, all-inclusive purpose of securing both the classes of good. Of the two needs into which the general human problem is divided, it is the higher, for it tends to include both.

And no doubt each of us must make a choice. Limitation of time and energy, even in the most favorable cases, prevents our assuming the whole task. Now some can choose with relative freedom, and on objective grounds, while others can not choose freely. The majority of men are so constrained by lack of opportunity in more than one or two directions, by the immediate necessity of earning a livelihood, or by strong temperamental bent, that they are unable to

take the objective attitude. But some, by grace of fortune, can do so; and upon these the choice of the larger problem, the advance of knowledge, seems incumbent. It is of course obvious that such a choice can not be quite exclusive; the purest of mathematicians must to some degree attend to his practical affairs. Nevertheless, one may make the cognitive end predominate over the practical to an extraordinary degree, without serious damage; and on the whole, when this is possible, it seems the nearest duty. The absolute need, the general human problem, at first a vague conglomerate, has thus developed into the need of knowledge, both for its own sake and for the sake of utility; and this completes the first step in the development whereby the initial problem gives rise to the fundamental human tasks.

But another step is necessary. "Knowledge" and "practical welfare" are ambiguous terms; each of them is of two kinds. Of practical welfare, we may distinguish the more immediate and the more remote. Such are, for instance, the well-being of the so-called "practical" man who is satisfied to obtain the material and social comforts of life for himself and his family, and that of the statesman who plans a future which he and his may scarcely live to enjoy. No doubt a union of these is the ideal. But here, as above, human limitations impose a choice; for every one who seeks practical welfare in preference to knowledge, the one or the other of these must be the predominant aim. And if one must choose, then the more remote ends are, on the whole, the more desirable ones. For the contrast is roughly that between far-sightedness and the lack of it. The greater practical benefactors of humanity, the moral and religious leaders who have held the passions of men in check, have in their wisdom preferred the future good to the present advantage. The relation between these two kinds of well-being is then an asymmetrical one, analogous to that between knowledge and practise. While each condition is admirable, and, if circumstances did but permit, even mandatory, they are not equally weighted motives; the more remote inclines the scale. But here, as in the preceding choice, no complete exclusion is possible; it is a matter of predominance.

This serves to introduce to us a similar partition within the sphere of knowledge. The field of intellectual pursuits comprises two divisions, one of which contains the special branches which study particular parts or aspects of the world, while the other includes that discipline which would group those branches together, correlate them, in order to know if there be a plan of the universe as a whole. The former division is that of the sciences, viz., biology, physics, psychology, economics, etc.; the latter can have no other name but philosophy. The former furnishes the more easily accessible knowledge, the latter the larger, less easily verifiable information. The former is more

capable of being put at once to advantageous use, the latter can be applied on the practical side perhaps only to aims of the longest range and the widest bearings. And if mankind were not sophisticated to-day by a sense of the difficulty of the latter problem, the errors and often the intolerance of its past devotees, it would not hesitate to acknowledge that the problem of philosophy is the higher in value. The very nature of the problem dictates this conclusion. If the universe were built upon some well-defined scheme, if there were principles which, under suitable cooperation, we could count upon to retrieve us from our too frequent discomfiture—then it would be of supreme utility to know that scheme and those principles. Or, if there be no such planful structure and behavior, it is as desirable to know that fact; for then we may with the better right adopt the easier task of satisfying our immediate wants. But it is not alone in respect to practical application that philosophical knowledge seems higher than scientific. From the merely intellectual point of view, also, it assumes the greater value. It represents the consummation of a progress in which each science is a stage. It answers an instinctive question which no extent of knowledge in this or that particular science, or in all together, is adequate to answer; which no amount of positivism, dogmatism, or skepticism can long stifle. Man is so made that he gets the greater intellectual satisfaction from the broader view, as one loves to ascend a tower in order to command a wider horizon. Of the two needs, then, into which the cognitive need divides, the philosophic is the more inclusive and the higher.

Now, once more, a choice must be made. Though neither interest need be excluded, one must predominate. From what has been said it follows that in view of the great human problem, philosophical rather than scientific knowledge must be the chosen end. Its pursuit approximates more nearly to that problem. As the far-reaching practical aims are higher than the immediate, so is philosophy, to the contemplative side of man, more satisfactory than science. But it is also higher than the farthest-reaching practical aims. Philosophy, if successful in its endeavor, is knowledge, and knowledge, unlike practise, ministers to more than its own instinct. It naturally succors the aims of practical well-being. Were this not the case, philosophy might indeed be *preferred* to the pursuit of such welfare, but it would not be objectively a higher aim. It is the self-transcending quality of knowledge and contemplation, their greater inclusiveness, to which the superlative worth of philosophy is due. And with this we have completed the second, and for our present purpose final, step in the development of the initial problem.

What then is the need to which philosophy is the response, and what is its place among human needs? Both are to be discovered

in the fact that of all human wants there is one and only one which, if satisfied, goes far toward satisfying the rest; that is, the need of a knowledge of the character, on broadest lines, of our universe. Such a knowledge, gratifying most fully the contemplative instinct, tends also to promote the deeper sort of gratification of the other great instinct, that for practical welfare. This end is the most inclusive single end we know. It is, in fact, but the original problem, the great human problem from which we started; but it is that problem made more precise and accessible to human effort. Or better, it is the closest approximation thereto which any one who must make a choice can adopt. And consequently its place among human problems and needs is very high, even the highest. It is no subjective whim, but an imperious and universal requirement—where such a choice is practically possible.

This being, in general terms, our conception of the true philosophical problem, we may pass to our second question: In what way do present systems fall short of it? To obtain the answer, we point to certain consequences of our view. Naïve though the view itself is, its consequences are decidedly important. If the unique significance of philosophy lies in its inclusiveness, its approximation to the one dominating problem of man, that significance is lost when the inclusiveness is set aside. In such an eventuality, philosophy meets no end but individual preference, nor has it any general human value. Now this may conceivably happen in either of two ways. Firstly, a principle might be discovered to hold of the universe as a whole, which by its very nature could not, in any time, place, or circumstance be turned to practical account. Some would deny that there are such principles, but we shall soon reply by specifying a few of them. At present we say only that it is a possible supposition. Secondly, a principle might be discovered which could not, in any time, place, or circumstance, help to account for the specific character of any particular fact known to science. This possibility may also be denied; we shall meet the denial in the same way as above. Both of these principles would fail of being genuinely philosophical. They might perfectly well be true, and in the widest and deepest manner. They would then satisfy the contemplative instinct. Nobody would, so far, have the right to refute them, or to blame their advocates for announcing them. If a man loves contemplation, he loves it, and unless by contemplating he injures some one, it is nonsense to impose upon him *ab extra* a moral law which forbids it. But this sort of knowledge does not minister to the universal need: it rather works against it. This is not because the discoverer is personally indifferent to considerations of utility, but because the truth in question by hypothesis precludes them. The philosopher may be permitted, while he is investi-

gating, to be indifferent to applications. Indeed, we should insist that only so can he do good work. But to be indifferent is not to be hostile; it is not to seek a principle which *can* have no application. The two are as distinct as doubt and disbelief. The kind of principle which *excludes* the satisfaction of other than contemplative needs can not, then, rightly be termed a philosophical principle; for the unique significance of philosophy lies in that it alone of all disciplines tries to meet the general problem of humanity.

This is perhaps clear with regard to practical applications; but does it hold of the second case noted above, where a principle is announced which can not account for any of the specific characters of things? Why is that not genuinely philosophical? We answer: because it also fails to meet that same general problem. The superior value of philosophy over science lies in the fact that it is broader than any science; but it is not broader if it leaves out what the sciences contain. And if it does not account for the detail of fact, either by incorporating the sciences directly or by grounding their particular laws more deeply, it does leave out the main body of their content. A philosophy composed of such principles is abstract, no matter how much it extols the concrete in its definition of reality. The choice between it and science is then a subjective matter, to be decided by temperament or opportunity. Whoever chooses such a philosophy has simply turned his back upon a large part of the general human need. Nor has he done this in order later to face about with added insight into the living detail of reality; the order of knowledge he attains gives no such insight. The great human need includes a desire to understand details as well as wholes; and an abstraction, however large which can not aid us to know more than the abstract, has no prerogative over any other truth, however petty. The fundamental meaning of philosophy is here lost; its generality becomes another kind of particularity. Mere form is no better than mere matter.

It is easy to object that we have set up an arbitrary view of philosophy. Many would refuse to define it in our all-inclusive fashion, saying that they are not interested in that sort of knowledge. Here undoubtedly one may make his choice. All that we have attempted to show is that if one chooses the narrower view he is taking the alternative that is, impersonally considered, not the valuable one. He is dodging the problem which the present condition of humanity thrusts upon every one who has leisure to reflect. He is degrading philosophy from its position of supreme dignity, as the one response to that problem, to the status of an eccentric whim. It may interest him to do so; it may even interest the majority of professional philosophers; nevertheless, it is not what human nature insistently craves,

and it is not the kind of thing that will in the end be edifying to the understanding, or will survive the buffets of natural selection.

Now we contend that the "schools" of present-day philosophy do for the most part announce just such intellectually and practically barren principles as we have described. Not *all* their doctrines are such, of course; but the ones that are noticed, fought over, defended, and attacked most ardently, are in the main quite sterile. Every system has what James would have called its thin and its thick parts, but the thin parts almost exclusively concern the modern protagonist. Consider, for instance, voluntaristic idealism. It announces that reality is a certain sort of will-object. Yet no idealist intends to explain by this how it comes that reality gravitates, or is electrified, or is divided into organic and inorganic, multiplies by sexual intercourse, etc. Nor does he tell us how man can, for this doctrine, adjust himself the better to his environment. "No," he says. "We leave these details to science and to life." Precisely so. Yet a philosophy that does not illuminate science or life makes itself by its aloofness into a purely formal affair. Its devotees must sooner or later become specialists in the bad sense; their high mission to mankind has failed, for they have forgotten the great problem of humanity. To be sure, there is another part of voluntaristic idealism; the thicker side. This is where it deduces from its concept of the will-object the various categories used by science and practise. Here it approaches nearer to the definiteness of the real world: all honor to it for the attempt! Yet how many critics of idealism have the patience to follow the detail of the deductions given, say, by Royce and Münsterberg? Such endeavors to come closer to reality are scarcely discussed. And in any case, we must confess, the categories deduced are indifferent to the content of the objects to which they apply. They do not grow out of that content, explain it, or apply to its detail, but are, as it were, let down miraculously from heaven to keep the chaotic mass in order. Even here there is no true connection with the specific reality. And of rationalistic idealism, much the same is to be said. When reality is defined as a problem set to the *Denkthätigkeit*, what has that to do with the facts of radiation entropy, or wave-motion? What rationalist to-day dares descend into the particulars of the concrete as Hegel once did? And on the other hand, what critic of rationalism follows the painstaking deductions of Natorp in his attempts to come nearer to reality in the scientific categories? The thin is discussed and rejected, when its truth would be indifferent; the thicker is overlooked.

But the idealists are not the only sinners. The realists, in spite of their professed empiricism, have shown themselves no less barren. Having asserted the independence of external reality, they have told

us nothing of its structure and behavior. One does not see why we are better off for knowing that everything is objective, than if we knew everything to be subjective. It tells us, so far, not one jot about the reason why events are causal, or temporal, or spatial, or numerable, or how it comes that some things have life and others do not—still less how the objectivity of everything enables us to conduct our lives more properly. From idealists, indeed, we had attempts, though only formal ones, to account for the relations governing the real world; from realists, who profess an interest in reality, we have had no inkling of such an endeavor. And in saying this we are not unmindful of the abstract analyses by certain realists of the categories of exact science; for these analyses pay scant regard to the concrete material wherein those categories are exemplified. Pragmatism, too, must come under the same indictment. With its relatively novel view of truth, it seemed to offer a means of escaping some of the above futile issues; yet the pragmatists have only continued to refute the others and to demonstrate that truth is what they say it is. But it is not so much a definition of truth, as a few useful truths, that pragmatists ought by their own principles to give us. We do not deny that they can do this; but it appears that they are not interested in doing so. And, at best, one may doubt that the formula "stimulus-hypothesis-reaction" will be very fertile to explain the rich manifold of the external world. In regard to the Bergsonian system, most of the discussions confine themselves to its criticism of intellectualism. But what avails it to dispute whether reality is intelligible or not, when no one tries to understand its concrete detail? The thicker portion of the system, which concerns itself with an explanation of life's evolution, based upon biological and psychological evidence, is in professional circles not much noticed. Of absolute idealism it is often said that it is an abstract doctrine, explaining nothing in particular just because its formula fits everything so easily. This is no attack upon its truth, but upon its importance. Mr. Bradley frankly recognizes the impossibility of accounting for the details of reality or furnishing a usable map of the universe, but he regards such a task as quite outside philosophy. "The way of philosophy . . . is not the way of life or of common opinion, and to commit one's self to such a principle may be said to depend upon choice."¹ We agree that it is a matter of choice, but we deprecate the choice which has been made.

Let the above suffice for examples; the reader may continue the indictment for himself. To describe the situation: it is as if one, consumed by thirst, were offered an empty goblet, elaborately carved and of exquisite workmanship. He may, if his thirst permit, contemplate the goblet, and argue with friends over its proper description; as the

¹ "Appearance and Reality," 1st ed., page 501.

dispute waxes hotter he may even forget his thirst. This way, we conceive, has modern philosophy gone. But whatever account of the goblet prevails, thirst is unquenched and will return. The human race has need of a knowledge which philosophy alone is capable of giving it, but which it has not even attempted—during most of the modern period—to furnish. And one must suspect that a main reason why philosophy is still so contemptuously regarded even by the educated is just this dearth of results that can be turned either to practical or to intellectual account.

But let not the accusation be too sweeping. A few bright spots appear in the darkness. The larger part of the Bergsonian system, whatever be its errors, is devoted to offering a plan which would explain much of the concrete manifestation of life, and a method of regeneration for man by cultivation of intuition rather than death-seeking intellect. It is capable of utilization; it aids syndicalism, it inspires psychical research. And consequently, this system has stirred men as no other recent system has done. To a less extent, certain of James's doctrines have had concrete bearings; e. g., that of the growing universe whose future depends upon our contingent choices. But the system of Thomism is higher than any other by head and shoulders in its concreteness. Whether it is correct or not, it at least aims to show forth a very definite plan of the universe, worked out in the greatest detail during several centuries, offering man a means of salvation and grounding the categories which common sense employs for the guidance of life on this earth. And its influence, in point of numbers as well as of duration, has not been surpassed. Yet to what extent are these specific doctrines discussed in current philosophical journals?

Modern philosophy may be said almost to have lost the sense of reality. It matters not that it uses the word, even capitalizing it; it concerns itself little with the thing. Idealists tell us, with a kind of ascetic joy, that their doctrine has no consequences for the particular exigencies of life; but such deprivation is nothing to be proud of. Realists and pragmatists declare that they are interested in the real world; but they remain under the influence of the idealistic foe, since they attack no problems save those of consciousness, error, secondary qualities, etc. If they excuse themselves by the plea that they must first demolish the idealist in his lair, one can only wonder; for that demolition was supposed to be finished. Why sit on the corpse and repeatedly plunge in the knife? Why not rise and investigate? The problem of the nature of mind is, to be sure, a genuine philosophical problem, provided one seeks to ground the specific behavior which minds display; but (excepting, we must admit, some of the work of Montague and Holt) it is generally studied only with a view to estab-

lishing realism or idealism. May we not, in fact, fairly challenge any one to name a single well-known doctrine of recent philosophy—except those above indicated—whose acceptance or rejection would make the slightest difference to anything but the formula for reality *überhaupt*?

If there be any sympathetic reader, he might here well ask: "What would you have us do?" The answer is ready, and has been so since Aristotle. We know some of the principal categories under which reality is manifested. Such are life, matter, mind, space, causation, probability, etc. Everything that is real is a case of one or more of these. Now we can ascertain the structure and behavior of the universe only when we know what these categories mean, how they work and combine to form the mosaic of the whole. But it is of no use to study them *in abstracto*, as has usually been done; since they do not work *in abstracto*. They must be examined in connection with the details to which they apply. We desire, for instance, a definition of mind which will tell us why minds have memory, feeling, will, how far mind is able or helpless before nature's courses, how minds came into being, and whether they endure after bodily death. We want a definition of causation which will show how it comes that a blow given a body will *move* that body rather than turn it blue; whether there is unbreakable necessity in the world, and a personal first cause, etc. In such a spirit did Aristotle and Hegel undertake their philosophical inquiries; shall the errors they inevitably made prevent us from profiting by their successes and continuing their labors? What we need, in sum, is information which will enable us to form a notion of the scheme of the universe, its make-up and functioning; a notion that will illuminate our knowledge of the parts and our conduct of life. The lack of a metaphysical system in this sense is nothing to boast of; it is a matter for shame. In spite of our frequent pretense at unconcern, we really want it more than we want anything else. And to vouchsafe something toward such a system can alone save philosophy from remaining what in very large measure it has become to-day, a narrow and unfruitful eccentricity.

W. H. SHELDON.

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE.